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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Original) A method of processing postal items, which method consists, during a first pass for sorting the items, in taking (12) a digital picture of a postal item, in deriving (15) from said picture a digital fingerprint (V-ID) which is a logic identifier for the item, and in storing the fingerprint of the item in a memory in correspondence with data about the item, and consists, during a second pass for sorting the items, in taking again (51) a digital picture of a current mail item, in deriving (52) from said image a digital fingerprint for the current item, and in searching the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass for a match with the fingerprint of the current item in order to retrieve the data about the item by association;

said method being characterized in that:

during the first sorting pass, said method further consists, in the memory, in associating (16) the fingerprints of the successive items with corresponding chronological serial numbers (SN); and

during the second sorting pass, for a series of successive item fingerprints for which matches have been obtained with fingerprints recorded in the memory in the first sorting pass, said method further consists in retrieving (61) a series (S1, S2) of corresponding chronological serial numbers, in computing (62, 65) an estimated chronological serial number for

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a current item from said series of chronological serial numbers, and in searching (63) for a match with the fingerprint of the current item on the basis of the estimated chronological serial number.

- 2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, in which the computation of the estimated chronological serial number consists in a linear approximation.
- 3. (Original) A method according to claim 2, in which two chronological serial numbers are computed (65) by linear approximation on the basis of two series of successive item fingerprints, and a distance between the two computed chronological serial numbers is measured.
- 4. (Currently Amended) A method according to any one of claims 1 to 3claim 1, in which the search for a match is performed on the fingerprints recorded in the first sorting pass in an exploration space centered around the fingerprint associated with a computed chronological serial number.
- 5. (Currently Amended) A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4claim 1, in which the postal items are directed to the sorting outlet bins of a sorting machine and in which the chronological order is the order in which the items are loaded into the sorting outlet bins.
- 6. (Currently Amended) A method according to any one of claims 1 to 5claim 1, in which the chronological serial number is constituted by the juxtaposition of a sorting center

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number, of a sorting machine number, of a sorting outlet bin number, and of a chronological index.

7. (Currently Amended) A machine for sorting postal items that is arranged to implement the method according to any preceding claim l.